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By Mary Louise Speer

Scott Community College's new entrance off U.S. 67 will ease the waiting time for students and staff at Belmont Campus.

The new asset was formally celebrated Wednesday by college staff, representatives from the cities of Bettendorf and Riverdale, and community well-wishers.

"This is a road. It's not a building so we're going to do something a little different," Thomas Coley, president of the college, said before driving a red Mustang through the ribbon.

However, faculty and students will have to wait a bit longer until the three-quarters of a mile roadway is officially open. Fall classes start on Aug. 27 and the entrance is expected to open before that date.

For now, the roadway is called the State Street Entrance Drive. However, Coley says he plans to get students and faculty involved in deciding on a permanent moniker.

College officials realized the campus needed a second access point over a decade ago. "At one point, students said they were tired of being backed up (out to Belmont Road)," he said. "Students organized to get petitions to get a second entrance onto campus."

The biggest challenges were getting everything aligned for the project and finding the necessary funds, he said. Certainly his predecessors wanted to see a second drive created to ease traffic and address safety concerns. Voters living in the Eastern Iowa Community College District, or EICCD, gave the project a major boost in 2007 when they approved a \$33 million bond referendum. A portion of those funds - and a \$490,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Transportation - paved the way for the drive. U.S. Rep Bruce Braley (D-Iowa) assisted with obtaining the DOT grant, said EICCD Chancellor Pat Keir.

"This has been a long time in coming. I think it will take a lot of traffic off Belmont Road," Mayor Jeff Grindle of Riverdale said.

The lower portion of the drive curves up a hill with a wooded area on the section that faces Alcoa Davenport Works. A major portion of the work involved the construction of a retaining wall of pre-made concrete blocks, said Kirk Barkdoll, facilities director for EICCD, that oversees Scott Community College. "We needed something substantial to hold that hill in place."

The college will add lights to wash the wall at night, native plantings and trees and finish the entrance digital message sign on State Street.

Other projects funded by referendum dollars are: new science wings at Scott, Clinton and Muscatine community colleges and a new educational center in Maquoketa.

About 4,600 students are expected to attend Scott Community College this fall and Barkdoll estimates that will bring between 2,000-2,500 vehicles onto the campus. The State Street entrance will not have a traffic light, initially, but that could change if the volume of users meets state guidelines, Barkdoll said.

"This a good asset for the college. It saves many people a lot of inconvenience," former Bettendorf alderman Norm Voelliger said.